

XVIII.—*Letters, Extracts, and Notes.*

We have received the following letters addressed "to the Editor":—

SIR,—I have recently been reading the paper by Mr. David A. Bannerman on the birds of Gran Canaria which appeared in 'The Ibis' for October 1912. As there are several points which I would like to comment upon, I should be much obliged if you would grant me space to do so.

On pages 565-6 Mr. Bannerman wrote that after the account which I gave of the Charco (*vide* Orn. Jahrb. xxi. 1910, p. 82) he had expected to see several Coots and Moorhens, but that they were remarkably scarce and, continuing, writes "Certainly it is not possible now in this 'Charco' to come upon the pretty picture of bird-life which Herr von Thanner portrayed in his paper." I see that Mr. Bannerman does not understand what I meant to convey. I particularly mentioned that there were only a few or single pairs of these birds.

On page 586 Mr. Bannerman wrote of *Anas marmorata*, "They are occasionally shot at Maspalomas, where Herr von Thanner *procured* specimens." This is a mistake; I never wrote that I had actually killed this Duck, as the kind proprietor, Don Pedro Castillo, forbade me to do so. I am sorry to see that a member of Mr. Bannerman's party shot a specimen.

Referring to *Accipiter nisus*, on page 589, Mr. Bannerman did not meet with this bird in the island. Certainly, as he remarked, the Sparrow-Hawk is very rare, although during my last visit to the island in 1912 I found it breeding at the "Cueva de las Niñas," where I had previously noticed a single female during my first visit to this spot. This is the place where Mr. Bannerman camped in 1910 and 1911. Herr Polatzek mentions that he has killed a female of this species near San Maté and found

nests in some remote orchards (Orn. Jahrb. xix. 1908, pp. 101-102).

Page 599. Mr. Bannerman was unfortunate in not meeting with the Tenerifian Redbreast in the pine forests. I found this bird not uncommon in the Pinar and breeding in three or four places near the Cueva de las Niñas. In the north of the island they are also common in suitable spots.

Page 601. With regard to *Sylvia melanocephala*, I must repeat that this bird is common everywhere in the south of Gran Canaria; they were numerous above Maspalomas and between the Puerto and village of Mogan.

On page 603 the author remarks, "Herr von Thanner mentions (Orn. Jahrb. xxi. p. 95) that there are no Chiffchaffs in the Pinar." This is a wrong quotation, which Mr. Bannerman has been kind enough to inform me was due to this remark in my paper having been wrongly translated for him. I wrote: "there are hardly any." The only spots where this bird is plentiful are near the escobón (*Cytisus proliferus*), whence they may enter into the surrounding Pinar. Near the "Charco" I collected a number of Chiffchaffs with light plumage and yellow tail-feathers. I sent these birds to Professor Dr. A. Koenig and have received a communication on the subject from Dr. Le Roi, in which he says that this paleness is due to use alone and that they do not constitute a distinct subspecies.

Mr. Bannerman has attacked me for shooting seventy-six examples of *Fringilla teydea polatzeki* (pages 615-6). I have been told that this same gentleman offered the forest guards five pesetas apiece if they would procure for him some examples of this very bird; this surprised me not a little! The same incident has occurred with regard to Mr. Ogilvie-Grant over the Bullfinch of the Azores: Mr. Ogilvie-Grant gave his reasons for shooting specimens of this Bullfinch in the 'Novitates Zoologicæ,' vol. xii. 1905, p. 127. For these same reasons as were given by Mr. Ogilvie-Grant, I myself felt no compunction in securing such specimens as I met

with. It may interest readers of 'The Ibis' to learn that Bolle already knew of the existence of a Blue Chaffinch in Gran Canaria. I have published a short notice relating to this fact (*Orn. Jahrb.* xxi. p. 225).

I must thank you for allowing me to take up so much of your valuable space.

I am, Sir,

Yours &c.,

RUDOLPH VON THANNER.

Casa inglesa, Vilaflor, Tenerife,

December 15th, 1912.

SIR,—Glancing through my copy of the 'Catalogue of the Collection of Birds' Eggs in the British Museum,' just received, I noticed that two eggs from the Tristram Collection, taken on "Grand Manan Is., Bay of Fundy," are described (on page 262) as those of *Passerculus princeps*. There would seem to be good reasons, however, for thinking that they must have been laid by *P. savanna*, for this is the only *Passerculus* known by American ornithologists to inhabit Grand Manan in summer, while *P. princeps* is unknown by them to breed anywhere save on Sable Island.

I am, Sir,

Yours &c.,

WILLIAM BREWSTER.

Cambridge, Massachusetts,

December 12th, 1912.

[The eggs in question, which came to the Museum from the Tristram collection, were labelled and presumably identified by Mr. T. M. Brewer, the well-known American ornithologist, and as Mr. Ridgway, in his recent work on the 'Birds of North and Middle America,' states that *Passerculus princeps* breeds on Sable Island and other islands off Nova Scotia, there seems to be no sufficient reason to alter or doubt the identification.—W. R. O.-G.]

SIR,—May we be allowed to make some brief remarks concerning Dr. P. L. Selater's "Commentary on the new 'Hand-List of British Birds,'" which appeared in the last issue of 'The Ibis' (pp. 113-127)?

In the first place, Dr. Selater does us the great injustice of misquoting what we wrote, and thus attributes to us a statement which we were never so ignorant as to have made. Dr. Selater writes (p. 114): "it is even stated that the nomenclature of Birds has been 'neglected for more than 150 years, although a requisite of the greatest importance,'" and further elaborates this misquotation by stating on p. 116 "it is not correct to say that the study of Zoological Nomenclature has been neglected during the past 150 years." We never said anything of the kind. What we wrote was ('Hand-List,' p. vi): "After all, what is nomenclature? It is little more than a system of labelling, and yet we have neglected for more than 150 years one of the requisites of greatest importance—that our labels should everywhere be the same for the same bird" (*italics are ours*).

As Dr. Selater has not only misquoted the words used, but has also entirely misinterpreted their meaning, it is perhaps necessary to point out that we likened nomenclature to a *system of labelling*, and stated that we had neglected the most important requisite of this system, viz., that our *labels* (or names) for the same bird should be everywhere *uniform*. We then proceeded to show how this want of uniformity had arisen and how it had continued for want of the "*adoption of a uniform system of nomenclature*." The whole of our Introduction is obviously a plea for the *universal* adoption of one system in order to secure uniformity, and we uphold the "International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature" as the only code which has *international authority*. We do not go into history of this or any other code, and whether we should have done so or not is a matter upon which we as authors and Dr. Selater as critic may well hold diverse views. But Dr. Selater's assumption, that because we did not mention Strickland's Code—perhaps the

best-known one—we were therefore ignorant of it, is quite unfounded.

With regard to the criticism on page 118, we have given an unnumbered binominal name as a general heading to each species or group of subspecies, and when a species is only represented by one form the binominal name is repeated immediately below and numbered, and the authority affixed, *e. g.* 12. *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* (L.); when it is represented by two or more forms, each is given with a number and authority below the binominal heading.

If Dr. Sclater will read the account of the "Distribution Abroad" of the Honey-Buzzard, he will see that there is some sense in calling it *Pernis apivorus apivorus*. Dr. Sclater is displeased with our adding the author's name to trinominals, and says that it is not correct to do so, because in many cases the original authors did not use trinominals. This criticism is quite unfounded, because the author's name does not refer to the combination, but to the last name only. This is in accordance with the International Rules and every other Code of Nomenclature. We may also be allowed to call attention to the numerous misquotations in the "Comparison of the Names of British Birds according to the List of the British Ornithologists' Union (1883) with the Names corresponding to them in the 'Hand-List' (1912)." To quote a few examples:—

Dr. Sclater says we have replaced the name of *Turdus atrigularis* by *Turdus ruficollis*! This is not correct, as we have called the bird *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis*. The trinominal is due to our regarding it as a geographical form of *T. ruficollis*, a fact which every ornithologist understands. We have not replaced *Sitta cæsia* by *Sitta europæa*, but we call the Central European form *S. europæa cæsia*, the *British* race *S. europæa britannica*, because both are obviously forms of *S. europæa europæa*. We have not replaced *Pyrrhula europæa* by *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, etc., etc. Dr. Sclater further exaggerates the differences in the two lists by counting a change of genus as a change of name, *e. g.* *Anas crecca* for

Querquedula crecca, and because we do not recognize *Cygnus immutabilis* as a distinct species he counts this also as a change of name!

From what is said at the bottom of page 116 and the top of p. 117 it might be inferred—and, indeed, no doubt will be by the ignorant—that we have had in England up to the advent of our ‘Hand-List’ a uniform “set of scientific names for our birds based on the Stricklandian Code.” That this is not so is, of course, notorious. We have given a few examples in our Introduction to show that even the authors of the B. O. U. List departed in their own separate works from that List! Need we labour the point further? And, are we ever to remain so insular as to imagine that British Ornithologists are the only ornithologists in the world, and that the nomenclature of British birds concerns us alone?

Finally, as the Stricklandian Code has *not* been adopted by any International body of Zoologists, is it worth while for a small group to continue to uphold it and thus delay the advent of the uniformity which Dr. Sclater himself desires? What does it matter to science if “journalists” and “occasional writers” “recognize their old favourites disguised under their new names” or not? How many of them now recognize their old favourites disguised under their many old *Latin* names? What is our convenience compared with the progress of science? And, to argue the matter from the narrowest and most selfish point of view: Is the convenience of the individual best served by a uniform system, even if that involves some change in the names to which he is accustomed, or by a number of systems or no systems, both of which alternatives involve the use of a number of different names for the same species?

As members of the B. O. U. we are proud of its past glories and the notable achievements of its life-long Editor, but we claim to share in the spirit of progress which inspired Strickland, and are confident that the world-wide advance of

our science cannot be permanently hindered by individual prejudice or reactionary pleas.

ERNST HARTERT.
F. C. R. JOURDAIN.
N. F. TICEHURST.
H. F. WITHERBY.

February 24th, 1913.

SIR,—I have just received the January number of 'The Ibis,' and I lose no time in telling you how pleased I have been in reading Mr. P. L. Selater's paper on Zoological nomenclature. I fully agree with him in every respect. Last summer I received from a German Society an invitation to subscribe to a protest against the law of priority. I refused to do it, or, more exactly, I did not answer it. More recently I have received from Dr. Hartert a second invitation to strictly adhere to that law. I told him that I admit the law of priority, but *cum grano salis*, and beginning with the twelfth edition of Linnaeus. The acceptance of the tenth edition has been the excuse of the actual confusion. For my part I shall stick to the twelfth edition to the end.

Perhaps it would be possible to draw up a list of names of those who follow the Stricklandian code, in opposition to those of the new school.

I am, Sir,
Yours &c.,
T. SALVADORI.

Turin,
January 25th, 1913.

SIR,—I have read with much interest Dr. Selater's commentary on the new 'Hand-List of British Birds,' as his claim for the Stricklandian Code is important at the present time.

I have been called an ultra-prioritarian, and it should be remembered that Strickland was the father of the Law of Priority, and by his own writings would now be considered

an ultra-prioritarian. He maintained that "the stern Law of Priority" *must* be obeyed, whatever the consequences. Neither Strickland nor the Stricklandian Code can be blamed for the present state of confusion, but rather the so-called followers, who never read or recognized the Code save when it suited their convenience. This was pointed out by one of its opponents, who gibed that it "was more honoured in the breach than in the observance."

The only differences between the Stricklandian Code and the International Rules are in minor points, wherein agreement has now been arrived at even by the "select committee" of the British Ornithologists' Union. I refer to the acceptance of the tenth edition of the 'Systema Naturæ' of Linné in place of the twelfth edition accepted in the Stricklandian Code, and the recognition of "toutonyms." Whether the former change was advisable may be still a moot point, but it has now become universally recognized, so that no further argument is necessary.

Dr. Selater's plea for "journalists, local list-makers, and other occasional writers" against the wishes of the "working ornithologists," who will "soon get used to it," can scarcely be considered worthy of criticism, as surely scientific work must not be retarded on account of the whim of a journalist or local list-maker. I would, therefore, conclude that, seriously speaking, little fault has been found with the "New Hand-List" by Dr. Selater, but rather that his Commentary is simply a review of it from the view-point of one of the older workers. When it is remembered that the comparison is with a List published *thirty* years ago, and which was in general disuse ten years afterwards, the extraordinary number of changes bears a very large discount.

Regarding the addition of the author of a species, I agree with Dr. Selater that it seems unnecessary when the original reference is also given, but otherwise it should always be quoted. My own criticism of the Hand-List would have been directed against the very wide limits of the genera used, the

lack of generic references, and the general classification followed. The authors would have furthered "uniformity" by generally adopting the evolutionary order provided by Sharpe in the 'Hand-list of Birds.'

These points I would like to see remedied by the select committee at present at work on the new B. O. U. List.

"Unless the Law of Priority is strictly applied no uniformity in International Zoological Nomenclature can obtain."

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.,

GREGORY M. MATHEWS.

Langley Mount, Watford, Herts.

February 4th, 1913.

The Second Freiburg Moluccan Expedition.—We have received from Mr. E. Stresemann the following account of his expedition to the Dutch Indies, which will, we hope, interest our readers. Mr. Stresemann, who is now at Tring working out his collection of birds, writes as follows:—

The second Freiburg Moluccan expedition, organized at the expense of those who participated in it, was led by Dr. Deninger, a geologist and a "Privatdocent" of the University of Freiburg. He was accompanied by Dr. Tauern, also of Freiburg, as physicist, and by Mr. E. Stresemann, of Munich, as zoologist. The object of the expedition was the exploration of the southern Molucca Islands, and especially Ceram and Buru.

A specially constructed motor-boat was taken with them, with which they hoped to reach more easily some of the less accessible islands, such as Kalao-tua, Mysol, and the Sula archipelago. Unfortunately, the boat was wrecked in the roads of Buleleng, off Bali. This, though it delayed the expedition, enabled it to make an unanticipated visit to the mountains of Perak in the Malay Peninsula, where the months of September to November, 1910, were spent.

The visit to the island of Bali lasted three months, and there

very valuable zoological and ethnographical collections were made. Thence they made their way to Ceram, where they stayed eight months, exploring the high mountains of the interior, never previously visited by travellers or collectors. Here very interesting zoological and botanical collections were made, particularly on Gunung Pinaia, the highest mountain of the island, which attains an elevation of 8300 ft. Subsequently, Dr. Tauern spent two months on Mysol, while Dr. Deninger and Mr. Stresemann worked on Buru. Here, too, where the interior is quite unexplored, the island was crossed twice from sea to sea, and the highest mountain, Gunung Fogha, which reaches an elevation of 6200 ft., was ascended. In April, 1912, the expedition returned home with a rich booty of observations and collections. The number of bird-skins brought back was upwards of 1200. A full report of the results of the expedition will shortly be issued.

The Alexandra Parrakeet (*Polytelis alexandre*).—In his interesting narrative of his journey 'Across Australia,' Prof. Baldwin Spencer gives the following account of his interview with this beautiful bird in the central wilderness.

"Amongst the birds the most interesting one to be found in the central area is the Princess Alexandra Parrakeet. This was originally described by Gould in 1863, having been discovered by Waterhouse during Stuart's third expedition in 1861, when he succeeded in crossing the continent from south to north. It is the most beautiful and delicately coloured, as it is the rarest, of our Parrakeets. It belongs to a small group characterised by the length and narrowness of the tail-feathers, which add to their graceful appearance, as compared with other Parrakeets. The natives call it 'Milturung,' which means 'long tail.' A fully-grown bird has a total length of seventeen inches, of which the tail forms more than eleven. Delicate shades of rosy and coral-pink, moss-green, cobalt-blue with

darker shades of brown and blue, blend together in such a way as to render the bird much less garish in its colour than most of our Parrakeets. At the time of the Horn expedition it was only met with once, far away in the western Macdonnells, when Mr. Keartland, the ornithologist of the party, most fortunately came across a flock of about fifteen perched in a small clump of 'desert oak.' This was in June 1894; in November of the same year they made their appearance in the eastern Macdonnells, nesting in hollow limbs of gum-trees, each nest containing five white eggs. Then for years they seemed to disappear, until, once more, they were recorded during the year 1905 from as far south as Oodnadatta. They feed on grass-seeds, more especially those of the porcupine-grass, which indicates that they normally inhabit dry and sterile country such as is avoided, as far as possible, by man. They certainly have a most remarkable habit of never appearing in the same part of the country during two successive years; in fact, when they do come, they make their appearance suddenly and disappear as suddenly and mysteriously, but whence they come and whither they go no one knows."

There are now two specimens of the Alexandra Parrakeet in the British Museum, obtained during the Horn expedition into Central Australia, and others living in the Zoological Society's Parrot-house.

The Pennant Collection.—The Earl and Countess of Denbigh have recently presented to the National Museum the collection of birds formed by Thomas Pennant, which has remained at Downing Hall in Flintshire in its original state since his death in 1798. The collection includes 142 specimens, the greater number of which are figured in his folio work on 'British Zoology' published in 1766.

Although there are no type specimens, the birds are of great historic value, and, in several instances, may assist in the solution of questions which have hitherto not been

determined or have given rise to much controversy. For instance, we may mention that the "Ringtail" proves to be a female of the Common Hen-Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*).

Another interesting pair of birds are the male and female Capercaillie, which, if their origin can be shewn to be Scottish, will prove of great value. At the present time no true British-killed example of the Capercaillie is known to exist in any Museum. This bird became extinct in England many years ago; but in Scotland and Ireland it lingered on till the latter part of the eighteenth century, and in Pennant's folio edition it is mentioned as being then "not frequent." The present Capercaillie of Scotland is of Scandinavian origin, and was introduced in 1837 by the then Marquess of Breadalbane at Taymouth Castle.

The specimens have been dismounted from their original cases and carefully labelled, and are to be kept together, so that they can be easily referred to.

The Birds of Sinai.—In the last volume of the 'Journal für Ornithologie'* is an article on the birds of the Sinaitic Peninsula, which will attract many of our readers, as the locality is one of special interest and is still imperfectly explored. After preliminary remarks and a useful list of the previous publications relating to the subject, Graf Zedlitz gives us a list of the 104 species of which he obtained specimens, or which have been positively identified as occurring in Sinai by previous authorities. Two of these are described as new subspecies, *Ammomanes deserti katharine* and *Columba livia palastinae*.

Numerous field-notes and systematic remarks are given on every species.

The Museum at Brighton.—We learn from 'The Times' that a collection of nearly 1000 bird-skins, the property of Mr. M. J. Nicol, is to be purchased for the Brighton Public

* J. f. O. 1912, pp 325 and 528.

Museum. Nearly all the specimens were obtained in Sussex. They are said to include a Black-eared Chat (*Saxicola stapazina*), the first British specimen obtained, and a Baird's Sandpiper (*Tringa bairdi*), the first European specimen obtained, besides examples of many other rare species.

A "ringed" Swallow taken in Natal.—'British Birds' for February reports that an adult Swallow which was ringed by Mr. J. R. B. Mascfield at Rosehill, Cheadle, Staffordshire, on 6 May, 1911, was caught in the farmhouse of the farm Roodesand, 18 miles from Utrecht, Natal, by Mr. J. Meyer on 23 December, 1912.

This is the first occasion on which European-bred Swallows have been definitely proved to migrate to South Africa, and is the more remarkable as it has generally been supposed that our British-bred Swallows travelled down the west coast of Africa, and it could hardly be expected that they would spread so far to the east as Natal.

The B. O. U. second New Guinea Expedition.—At the last meeting of the B. O. C. on March 19 it was announced that news had been received by cable that Mr. Wollaston, in company with a Dutch Officer, had reached the summit of Carstensz Peak, about 16,000 ft., at the end of January. Further particulars are expected as the news came through Dutch sources and not direct from Dr. Wollaston.

The Annual Meeting of the B. O. U.—Members are reminded that the Annual General Meeting of the Union will be held at the offices of the Zoological Society in Regent's Park at 4.30 P.M. on Wednesday, April 9th. The Meeting will be an important one, as a new President and a Secretary have to be elected, and it is therefore hoped that there will be a good muster of Members.

Proposers of new Members should either attend themselves to speak on behalf of their candidates or send a letter of recommendation to the Secretary.